2008 Session in Review

Property taxes

In January my seatmates and I held a forum on property taxes. People are understandably alarmed at high rates, but the discussion was healthy and I came away determined to work on fundamental reforms. It will not be easy. We brought Finance Committee Chair Ross Hunter down for that meeting and he outlined the practical obstacles to quick action.

I remain committed to getting property tax relief passed for working families and seniors. In November we came in for a special session to reinstate the 1 percent cap on property tax increases. We must build responsibly on that in the next session.

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Dear Friend,

Here is a quick overview of some of the bills that I was especially pleased to help push through the Legislature. Many of you weighed in with e-mails and phone calls during the session. Your thoughts are always welcome, whether we are in session or not.

I'm especially grateful to the more than 500 people who mailed in the survey from the last newsletter. Individual responses are coming, but we had to put that off until there was time to sort through them all. We also conducted an innovative telephone-town hall -- more than 2,100 people picked up their phone and listened in for at least a few minutes.

What are the main messages from you and your neighbors? Your top three priorities: fix health care, improve ferry service, and keep taxes and government spending down. That is exactly where I'm working this summer. Please stay in touch. If you'd like me to meet with you and your organization, or a group of your friends and neighbors to talk about these or any other issues, just ask -- I'd be delighted to discuss any topic any time.

Thank you for allowing me to represent you and your neighbors in Olympia. I look forward to talking with you again soon.
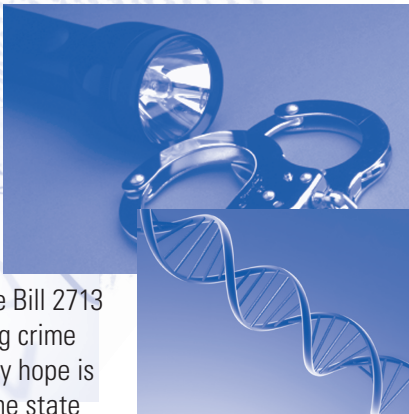
Larry Seaquist

Public safety

Every year we spend a lot of time talking about how we can make our communities safer places to live—and it's worth every minute. I believe families should feel safe in their neighborhoods, and there is always more we can do to try and prevent crimes.

Collecting DNA samples from more criminals

This is one of the best bills I've passed in the Legislature. DNA databases are the future of law enforcement. They catch more criminals, help law enforcement catch them quicker, and in doing so, allow officers more time to focus on other cases. My House Bill 2713 expands the mandatory sampling crime list by several new offenses. My hope is that these criminals will know the state has their number and choose not to reoffend.

Preventing up to 100 DUI-related deaths

This is another smart piece of legislation aimed at not only getting tough, but also working on smart strategies to prevent crimes. Legislation we passed will put alcohol-detecting devices in the cars of drunken driving offenders. This proposal has had incredible results in New Mexico, where the rate of alcohol-related fatalities dropped up to 30 percent. That would be about 100 lives a year here in Washington.

Health care

Things are not good with our health care system, and this session we've only made baby steps towards possible solutions. The problem is so big, so vast, that the state really needs the federal level to become more involved. I'm focused on tracking the more than $10 billion we spend on health care, so we can get sky-rocketing costs under control.

More family doctor practices

The already low rate of doctors choosing primary care is continuing to decline. It isn't a coincidence that as more people see specialists, instead of family doctors, health care costs soar.

This year we passed my House Bill 2549 to help doctors start primary care practices. It's my goal to have a family doctor for every family, at a price every family can afford.

A citizens' work group on health care

There is increasing debate on what type of reform is needed to help the health care system. Starting this summer, research will be done on the many plans being discussed. This research will then be handed to a citizens' work group who will bring the plans to the public. It's a great idea, but I'm concerned the process isn't quick enough. In the meantime, I'll continue talking with doctors, nurses, health care advocates *and you* to come up with common-sense health care solutions.

Transportation

Our district faces unique issues when getting around. The waters that make our area so beautiful also make traveling expensive. Even still, our commuters deserve fair treatment for the tolls or fares they pay. On those fronts, this was a strong session.

The Narrows Bridge

I'm continuing my crusade to have every staff person allotted for this bridge explained to the public. This session I worked successfully to include language in our draft Transportation Budget to reduce staff and other operating costs, which will save several million dollars.

Washington State Ferries

Despite the months of terrible headlines, we started to make some progress in our efforts to overhaul the ferry system. We made $4.9 million worth of cuts to headquarters staff and redirected that money into running the system. We adopted a five point plan for long-term reform, and the governor has replaced the leadership team at the ferries.

Replacing the aging fleet is now my top priority. We funded six new vessels, ringing in a new generation of boat building in Washington. There is still a great deal of work to be done and I will work with the rest of the Kitsap delegation to keep the system accountable.